A Pilgrim Mother

by

Helen May Crockett

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A Pilgrim Mother

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Helen May Crockett

A PILGRIM MOTHER

A DRAMA IN ONE ACT

HELEN MAY CROCKETT

THE PILGRIM PRESS

BOSTON CHICAGO

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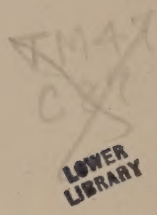

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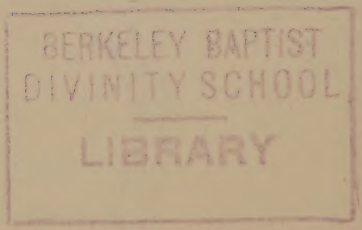

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Foreword

A Pilgrim Mother owes its conception to Dr. Ozora S. Davis of the Chicago Theological Seminary, who vividly painted, at our Thanksgiving breakfast, the culinary problems of four women on that first Thanksgiving Day. Mrs. Ozora S. Davis made valuable suggestions as to the character of John Billington, who is here called Jack to avoid confusion. To Professor Fred Eastman and Mr. Davis Edwards and to their classes in Religious Drama Writing and Drama Production, the play owes much of its present form. To all who have shared in its creation, *A Pilgrim Mother* is dedicated.

HELEN MAY CROCKETT.

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THE CHARACTERS

THE BILLINGTONS "shuffled aboard" the Mayflower. They came from England but were not a part of the original Pilgrim party. They were motivated by a desire for adventure, not for religious liberty. They were less cultured than the rest of the colony. When this scene opens,

ELLEN BILLINGTON has already caught the spirit of the colony and has begun to make its ideals her own. She hopes that their present environment and associations may have a wholesome effect upon her family. She is an optimistic, generous woman of great determination. She is devoted to her family and loves her husband in spite of his sins.

JACK BILLINGTON is a tall, shambling fellow of middle age. He likes hunting and fishing better than any steady employment, and has gained a reputation in the colony for laziness. He loves his family, even though he fails to provide for them.

FRANCIS BILLINGTON is the baby of the family. At eleven years he is considered too young for regular work. He has the disposition of his father but shows a great affection for his mother. Life for him has become a great adventure since the coming of the Indian, Tisquantum or "Squanto."

JOHNNY BILLINGTON is two years older than Francis, serious and thoughtful beyond his years, as if trying to make up for the weaknesses of his father. Historically, he was the discoverer of Billington Island.

Susanna White is a delicate, cultured woman, still grieving over the death of her husband. She lives for her two little sons and her orphan nephew, at the same time trying to care for her overworked brother, the doctor of the colony.

Edward Winslow is a polished, cultured gentleman and a born diplomat. Mistress Winslow has already fallen a victim to the epidemic of typhus which swept over the colony, and he is lost without her.

Elder Brewster is the religious leader of the colony, tall, dignified, unyielding in moral questions, and eloquent in prayer.

Mistress Brewster, his wife, is a cultured woman with a strong sense of duty and a tender heart. She finds the extra burdens that have fallen upon the women of the colony almost beyond her strength.

Mistress Hopkins is vigorous and forceful in her manner of expression. She shows fewer signs of culture than Mistress Brewster.

A PILGRIM MOTHER

PLACE: Home of Jack Billington, Plymouth, Massachusetts.

TIME: April, 1621.

A door at the left leads to the road; another, right one, to the sleeping quarters; a third, right two, to a path in the woods. Up center is a fireplace, above which hang various cooking utensils. On either side of the fireplace are windows in which oiled paper takes the place of glass. In front of the fireplace is a rough bench. Down left stands a spinning wheel, behind which is a three-legged stool. Down right is a table constructed from rough boards. Behind the table is an armchair, almost the only object in the room which bears evidence of having been brought from England. Up left a home-made cupboard stands against the wall. Up right a cradle seems to hold a sleeping baby. From the ceiling hang different kinds of herbs. A teakettle is steaming over the fire.

When the scene opens, MISTRESS ELLEN BILLINGTON, *a pleasant-faced woman wearing a neat woolen dress with white collar and cuffs and a white apron, is seated at the spinning wheel, working industriously. As she works, she hums "A-Hunting We Will Go," continuing the song after* FRANCIS *enters.* FRANCIS BILLINGTON, *a boy of eleven years, dressed in a plain suit of rough materials, enters, right two, noisily and excitedly.*

FRANCIS: Hey, Mom! (*He pauses, right center, in surprise while* ELLEN *goes on with the the song.*) Why, Mom! What are you singing?

ELLEN: I know Elder Brewster thinks such songs are sinful, Francis, but I can't see any harm in them.

FRANCIS: I like it. Say, Mom, Squanto is going to look at our traps to see if we have caught anything. Can I go along?

ELLEN: Will you promise not to get separated from Squanto?

FRANCIS: Yes, I'll promise. Can I go?

ELLEN: Very well, then.

FRANCIS: Whoopee! Can I have a bite to eat before I go?

ELLEN: See if there isn't some johnnycake in the cupboard.

FRANCIS (*going to the cupboard, which appears almost empty, and taking down a plate containing a single piece of corn bread*): There's just the piece you did not eat for breakfast. (*He crosses center.*) Don't you want it, Mom? It's really your share.

ELLEN: No, I saved it for you.

FRANCIS: Thanks. (*He begins to eat, trying to talk between bites.*) Perhaps we'll catch a bear. Then I'll give you the skin for a rug.

ELLEN: A bear?

FRANCIS: Yes. Squanto caught a bear once, and he says the Indians use the skins for rugs.

ELLEN: I'm afraid it's too late in the season for bearskins to make good rugs. Bears are shedding now. We might get hair in the soup. (*She smiles.*)

FRANCIS: I'll catch a fox then, and you can have a fur coat next winter.

ELLEN: A fox would be a big present.

FRANCIS: Squanto says some beavers are building a dam up the creek. I'll bring you one of them if you'd rather have it.

ELLEN: A beaver!

FRANCIS: Anyhow, I'll catch a rabbit for supper.

ELLEN: A rabbit! Now that is nearer your size. I'll hope for a rabbit.

FRANCIS (*starting to go*): When I get big I want to be just like Squanto. He can make good traps and shoot real straight with his arrows!

ELLEN: Come here, Francis. (FRANCIS *crosses right. She puts her arm around him.*) Are you sure you want to be like Squanto? I thought you said Squanto told lies to the Indians about the power of the white man, and tried to make them believe we would do whatever he said.

FRANCIS: Well, he did, but he has lots of fun fooling the other Indians.

ELLEN: I don't want my boys to be like Squanto.

FRANCIS: Why, Mom? He's big and strong. I guess you'd like him if you went hunting with him.

ELLEN (*becoming absorbed in thought and speaking the next three lines as if in reverie*): I want you to be as honest and kindly as these Pilgrims among whom we live.

FRANCIS: Aw! (*He squirms under the lecture.*)

ELLEN: I want you to be as brave and as fearless as Captain Miles Standish —

FRANCIS (*interested*): Yes.

ELLEN (*continuing as if she had not heard him*):— as neat and as chivalrous as Master Edward Winslow; and I want you to fear God and try to please Him as hard as Elder Brewster does.

FRANCIS (*squirming again*): Aw, pshaw!

ELLEN: Remember that one reason the Pilgrims came to this land was to convert the Indians. (*Turning*

to Francis.) You should help Squanto to be better instead of being just like him.

FRANCIS (*eager to be off*): I'll try, Mom. He is waiting for me. May I take the kitchen knife?

ELLEN: I don't like to let you have it, Francis. It's the only one we have, and if it should get lost ——

FRANCIS (*interrupting*): Please, Mom. I won't lose it.

ELLEN: No, Francis. Now don't tease.

FRANCIS: Aw, Mom! I wish I had a knife of my own. I could make lots of things if I had a knife. I wish I could go back to England and get one.

ELLEN: Perhaps we can send for one when your are older. (FRANCIS *starts towards the door, wiping the crumbs from his mouth.*) Now remember, the Indians are not all as friendly as Squanto. Goodbye, Son!

(FRANCIS *goes out, right two, whistling "A-Hunting We Will Go."* ELLEN *continues to spin, her face now wearing a pleasant smile, which fades as* JACK BILLINGTON *enters. He is none too neat in appearance, and he moves in a good-natured, lazy manner.*)

JACK: Here's your sassafras. I missed a shot at five or six deer because my hands were too full to carry a musket. (*He throws his hat and coat on the floor, then puts on the table the basket he has been carrying.*)

ELLEN (*crossing down left and looking in the basket*): Is that all you brought? You didn't stay very long.

JACK: No, I came for my musket. (*He carries his spade up center, takes a musket down from the wall and carries it to the table where he begins to clean it with great care and affection.*)

ELLEN: Is hunting all you have to think about, Jack Billington?

JACK: Deer haven't been so plentiful lately that I can afford to lose these.

ELLEN: We have always had plenty of meat—and little else. It's meat, meat, meat, until I am sick of the thought of it.

JACK: Yes, but it's not so easy to get as some people may think.

ELLEN: That's what you always say when there's any work to be done. You ought to spade up the garden today, Jack. It is such a fine day.

JACK: The garden can wait.

ELLEN: It is vegetables we are hungry for. Here it is the middle of April, and you haven't spaded any ground yet.

JACK: Isn't Johnny working at it?

ELLEN (*sitting down at the spinning wheel*): Yes, but he's only a boy. You ought to help him.

JACK: Where's Francis?

ELLEN: I let him go off with Squanto.

JACK: He ought to be learning to work instead of running around with that Indian.

ELLEN: Governor Carver planted his garden last month. His peas are already up and doing fine.

JACK: Much good it will do him, if his wife dies of the scurvy;

ELLEN: But we shall die of starvation, if we don't raise something to eat. You ought to get that garden planted.

JACK: I guess there is no danger of our starving before the rest do, so long as they put what they raise in a common storehouse.

ELLEN: But it's not right to eat what others raise unless we do our share.

JACK: What's that got to do with it?

ELLEN: You signed the agreement on the Mayflower. You promised to work for the good of the whole colony.

JACK: That was your doing. (*Pause.*) Besides, I didn't say what kind of work I'd do. I like to hunt and fish better than anything else.

ELLEN: Yes, but how much meat and fish have you put in the storehouse? The next time we're out of meal, you'll have to go for some.

JACK: Why can't you go, the way you always have? Are you sick?

ELLEN: No, I'm ashamed to go to the storehouse again. Everybody is complaining that we put nothing in and take plenty out.

JACK: You haven't starved yet, have you?

ELLEN: No, and I'm not going to, because you are going to put in that garden.

JACK: Is that so? Who's going to make me?

ELLEN: The whole colony will, Jack. Don't you realize how they are all complaining about you?

JACK: The colony can go to——

ELLEN: Jack; Shame!——

JACK: Oh, let me alone! I'm not going to be nagged.

ELLEN: I don't want to nag you, Jack. But please, won't you put in the garden?

JACK: Of course I will—in my own good time.

ELLEN: Today, Jack!

JACK: Not today. Tomorrow, if I get those deer first.

ELLEN: You shall not go hunting until that garden is planted.

JACK: I'll do as I please. Stop bossing me around, or I won't ever plant the garden.

ELLEN: I've cooked the last meal you are going to get until you do.

(*There is a knock at the door.*)

ELLEN: Come. (*Enter* SUSANNA WHITE, *left.*)

ELLEN AND JACK (*rising*): Good morning, Mistress White.

SUSANNA: Good morning, friends. I have just come from taking a bowl of broth over to Mistress Carver.

ELLEN: Is she worse?

SUSANNA: The doctor was there all night. He wanted me to come straight over here and ask you to come and help, Mistress Billington. He says there's no one else with your knack of making the sick comfortable. If anyone can get the Carvers well, it is you.

ELLEN: To be sure I'll go, Mistress White. Wait until I can get ready. Please sit down.

(*She goes into the next room, but leaves the door open.*)

JACK: You'd better stay at home and look after your own family. Some day you'll bring the scurvy home to us.

SUSANNA: (*sitting on left of bench*): Governor Carver came to the house while I was there. He complained of a pain in his head.

JACK: That's what comes of too much work in the garden. He really isn't over the fever yet.

SUSANNA: My brother put him to bed.

ELLEN (*from the bedroom*): The poor doctor! He isn't over the scurvy himself.

SUSANNA: Have you both heard that Captain Jones is leaving us at high tide today?

ELLEN (*coming to the bedroom door where she adjusts a fresh collar*): Is he? You don't say!

SUSANNA: He says he has waited too long already, because it has taken so much time for us to get our cabins built, and then all the sailors have been sick.

ELLEN: It will be hard to see him go, even though we have been expecting it.

SUSANNA: I wonder how long it will be before we shall see any of our friends from England?

JACK: Perhaps we shall be dead before another load can find us. I wish we were all going back on the Mayflower!

ELLEN (*emerging from the bedroom as she ties on a fresh apron*): Jack Billington! You ought to be ashamed! Our family hasn't lost even one member. We ought to be the last to talk about going back!

SUSANNA: Captain Jones will tell the others where to find us or bring them himself. And we can get along as the Indians do until they come.

ELLEN (*to Jack*): There! Did you hear that? If anybody ought to give up and go home it is Mistress White. She has to be both father and mother to three little boys, yet she doesn't talk about going back. (*She takes her cloak from a nail near the bedroom door and puts it on.*)

SUSANNA: I try to be brave for the children's sake, but I get discouraged. If I thought there would not be another ship for many years, I should agree with Master Billington that we ought to go back.

JACK (*to* ELLEN): Hear that? She's got sense.

ELLEN (*crossing to center and putting a hand on* SUSANNA'S *shoulder*): Now be of good courage,

Mistress White. We shall all see better times another year. What you need is a husband to look after you.

SUSANNA (*rising*): Mistress Billington, how can you talk so, when my William has been dead only six weeks!

ELLEN: No offense intended, Mistress White; but we must be practical, if we are to meet the problems of a new land.

JACK: There are at least sixteen men around here who would be glad of a good wife.

ELLEN: Now there's Master Winslow. He is always asking me to mend something for him. He's a gentleman if ever there was one.

SUSANNA: He does have a comfortable house and some good furniture. He sounds likely. (*Pause.*) How is he about his linen? Does he soil his cuffs readily?

ELLEN: No worse than most men. You should have seen his collar the first time he washed and ironed it himself! (*She laughs.*) The starch stuck and he scorched the ruffles.

SUSANNA: He does need looking after. I must be getting back to the children. I left Samuel to look after Resolved and Peregrine. No one can tell what mischief little boys will get into next.

ELLEN: And I'll be off to the Governor's. Jack, look after the baby while I'm gone. (*She walks over to the cradle and stands looking in.*) Poor babe! I wish your mother had lived. (*To Jack.*) He's asleep now. I guess he'll not waken until I get back. (*She crosses, left, picking up the spade and setting it down by the door.*) Jack, (*with emphasis*) here's the spade by the door.

(SUSANNA *and* ELLEN *go out, left,* JACK *contin-*

ues oiling and loading his guns. There is a loud knock at the door after which ELDER BREWSTER *and* EDWARD WINSLOW *enter, left. Elder Brewster is a tall, well-built, middle-aged man of splendid carriage. Edward Winslow, who is shorter, shows the effects of his recent illness. Both are neatly dressed in the conventional garb, dark suits with white collars and cuffs. They carry muskets, which they place near the door as they enter.*)

ELDER BREWSTER AND EDWARD WINSLOW (*bowing*): Good morning, Master Billington.

JACK: Good morning, Elder Brewster. Good morning, Master Winslow. Please be seated.

ELDER BREWSTER: Governor Carver planned to see you today, but he's not feeling well. He asked us to come for him.

JACK: What can I do for you?

EDWARD WINSLOW: Master Billington, you came among us on the Mayflower, a stranger.

JACK (*wonderingly*): Yes.

EDWARD WINSLOW: Although we did not understand what motives had brought you, we were glad to accept you as one of ourselves.

JACK: What are you driving at?

EDWARD WINSLOW: Of course your boys have been inclined to be mischievous. None of us will ever forget the day Francis experimented with your fowling piece and almost sank the Mayflower and all of us with it.

JACK: Have those boys been making trouble again? I'll see to them!

EDWARD WINSLOW: No, it is not the boys we have come to talk about. It is you.

JACK: Me?

ELDER BREWSTER: The question is, Master Billington, why are you not living up to the compact we made before we left the ship?

JACK: What do you mean?

ELDER BREWSTER: We mean, why aren't you out at work?

EDWARD WINSLOW: The governor and all the men of the colony have felt we ought to get the crops planted as early as possible.

JACK: And why should I work? What do I get out of it?

ELDER BREWSTER: What do you get out of it? You get the same as the rest of us, your daily bread, and perhaps some more to help pay the company for your passage over.

JACK: Work seven years for the privilege of having endured sixty-seven days of misery and seasickness! And after seven years of slavery for the company, what do I have left? Not even the home I have built with my own hands.

ELDER BREWSTER: When your debts are paid, you'll have a free conscience.

JACK: Free conscience, bah! I came here to gain real freedom—freedom to hunt and fish and to enjoy life. Instead you want me to work for men in England who would be unwilling to endure the hardships of pioneer life themselves. Why should they live in luxury in England on the fruit of our struggles! Who of them has gone without butter, milk and vegetables for a year? Who of them has

not even a leather sole for his shoes? (*He holds up a moccasined foot.*)

ELDER BREWSTER: They invested their money in this enterprise as we did. It is right that they should have some profit.

EDWARD WINSLOW: You did not take any stock yourself, I believe, although you would be entitled to a share for yourself and wife, and a half-share for each of the boys.

JACK: No, I did not invest any money and I am glad of it; for now my time is my own and I am free to do as I please with it.

ELDER BREWSTER (*rising*): You are *not* free! You still owe for your own and your family's passage over. You have eaten from our storehouse for nine months. Your time is not your own until you have paid for these things. Are you going to work or shall we take measures?

JACK (*who has risen also*): What measures?

ELDER BREWSTER: Have you forgotten the day you spent in the stocks in front of the meetinghouse?

JACK: No, I have not forgotten. But you can no longer frighten me with the taunts of children or the jeers of Indians. I do not intend to suffer that indignity again.

EDWARD WINSLOW: Then you'll put in your garden today, Master Billington?

JACK: No, I'll be——

ELDER BREWSTER (*interrupting*): Wait! No profanity here, Master Billington!

JACK: I know what you are going to say, so don't preach to me.

ELDER BREWSTER: We shall have to put you in the stocks until you are willing to work, or ask you to

return to England. We have no place here for those who expect to live by the work of others.

JACK: Do you mean that you want me to take my family and go?

EDWARD WINSLOW: No, we want you to stay and work with us. And we did not say anything about your family. Your son is setting you a good example in the garden, and I dare say the women would hate to part with Mistress Billington.

JACK (*angrily*): Where I go, my family goes also. I am going back to England.

ELDER BREWSTER: Better not be too hasty. You'll have to work in England.

JACK: I meant what I said. We shall go back on the Mayflower.

ELDER BREWSTER: Then I'll tell Captain Jones to wait a bit until you can get your things together. (*He goes out, left.*)

JACK (*stands thinking for a minute*): Now where are those boys? They must help me get things together.

(*He goes out, right.* EDWARD WINSLOW *paces the floor once or twice, then sits by the table, apparently lost in thought.* ELLEN *enters, left, and approaches* EDWARD WINSLOW *to greet him. He does not see her at first.*)

ELLEN: Good morning, Master Winslow. What's the trouble this time? Has the button come off your cloak, or did you burn your porridge?

EDWARD: Both, Mistress Billington. (*He holds out his cloak.*) And worse than that, your husband has been offended and insists that he is taking you back to England.

ELLEN: Back to England? He hasn't consulted me about it yet. I have the Carvers to look after now.

Mistress Brewster promised to stay with them while I came home to brew some sassafras tea.

EDWARD: It is fortunate that we have you to look after all of us, Mistress Billington.

ELLEN: I fear I haven't been doing all I should for you lately.

EDWARD: How is that?

ELLEN: I used to hold you up as an example of neatness to Francis and Johnny. I have always wanted them to look and act like gentlemen. But these last three weeks since Mistress Winslow has been gone, I have wondered if she should not have had the credit for your fine appearance.

EDWARD: It is hard for a man to live alone. I fear I never gave Elizabeth full credit for all she did for me.

ELLEN: I didn't mean to criticize, Master Winslow, but most men do need looking after. (*She sits erect, looks penetratingly at her visitor, and plies her needle only occasionally. Her whole manner expresses a calculating purpose and a determination to carry her point.*) It's a woman who keeps a man from reverting to his natural state. It isn't that I'm not willing to do what I can for you; but if I were you, I'd not lose much time about marrying again.

EDWARD: It is too soon to think about that, Mistress Billington.

ELLEN: But we must be practical in meeting the problems of the wilderness. I'm sure Mistress Winslow would want you to be well cared for.

EDWARD: If your husband takes you away, I may have to follow your advice.

ELLEN: Didn't I assure you that I've no intention of returning? I hope Susanna White will not hear of this foolish notion you say he has. Poor woman! She's so lonely since Master White's death. She fears for the children. Boys need a father's training.

EDWARD: Yes, we all sympathize with her I am sure.

ELLEN: This morning she said she wished we were all going back to England with Captain Jones.

EDWARD: She did?

ELLEN: If she were to talk to Jack now, I fear it might give her the notion of going back.

EDWARD: That must never be. We have too few women here now.

ELLEN: Very true. No colony has yet succeeded in this new land without women.

EDWARD: Is she a good cook?

ELLEN: As good as any in the colony. In England she was famed, they say, for her fine needlework. She is a good housekeeper, too.

EDWARD (*looking into space*): She doesn't seem very strong.

ELLEN: Most of us still feel the effects of the winter's ravages, Master Winslow. She'll improve faster when she stops worrying about how she can bring up her children alone. (*She hands back Master Winslow's coat in good repair.*)

EDWARD: Thank you, Mistress Billington, for your help. I don't see how I could manage without so good a neighbor.

ELLEN: Come in any time you need help. But I really think it would be more satisfactory to you to have such help nearer at hand.

EDWARD: Good day, Mistress Billington.

ELLEN: Good day, Master Winslow.

(EDWARD WINSLOW *goes out, left.* ELLEN *hurries about preparing a brew of herbs. From the rafters and the basket she takes bunches of roots and dried leaves, and pours over them water from the steaming kettle.* JACK *and* JOHNNY BILLINGTON *enter, right, carrying two rough planks.*)

JACK: Now see if you can make a cover for the wood box out of these planks. That box will be a good one to carry our food in.

JOHNNY: Can we go back to the old home and see Granny and the boys?

JACK: I hope so.

JOHNNY: But Father, I don't want to go back to England. I have just planted quite a patch of corn and I want to see it grow.

JACK: Tut, tut! boy. You do as I say.

ELLEN: What does this mean? What are you doing, Jack?

JACK: Ellen, we are going back to England with Captain Jones. Pack up your things.

ELLEN: Jack Billington, are you crazy?

JACK: No, I have just come to my senses. We are going back where people really live. We ought never to have joined this bunch of fanatics. Let us hurry and get ready.

ELLEN: I am not going. I can't leave now with Mistress Carver sick and this poor baby to be cared for. What put such a notion into your head?

JACK: It's the same old story. While you were away, Elder Brewster and Master Winslow were here, nagging me to be out clearing land and planting corn. They forget that it is meat and fish that the

colony has been living on, and I have brought in more of that than any man around.

ELLEN: I know, Jack, but they are anxious to have enough for next year. Anyone can catch plenty of fish and deer.

JACK: There you go again, working against your husband and siding with the rest of them!

ELLEN: What if I agreed with you and we returned to England without property, without a home or anything to furnish it? You'd have to work there, wouldn't you? Of course we have often been hungry here, but I remember times in the old country when the Billingtons did not have any too much to eat.

JACK: At least we should not have anyone to tell us what we should eat and how much.

ELLEN: Neither should we have any friendly group to provide it for us out of their own storehouse.

JACK: And when we get home we can talk as we please and there will be no one to object, no matter how many swear words we use.

ELLEN: That is another reason why I want to stay here. You know your profanity is not good for the boys. I want them to grow up here among these Pilgrims, to learn something of their honesty, their fearlessness, and something of the God they worship.

JACK: Your mother has grown pious here in the forest, Johnny. If we don't get her away soon, she will go crazy.

JOHNNY: Mother is all right. I'd like to stay here and be just like Captain Standish. He said when I was a couple of years older he would let me drill in his company.

JACK: When you're a couple of years older you'll be back in good old England. Now hurry up with that box, so that we can get it packed. (JOHNNY *leans forward as if about to protest, then thinks better of it and goes out, right.*)

ELLEN: You go back if you want to. The boys and I are going to stay here. They are old enough now for us to manage alone.

JACK: You can manage alone. The boys and I are going back.

ELLEN: The boys are mine. You have no right to take them from me.

JACK: I am their father. I have a right to say where they shall live.

ELLEN: I'll never let you have them.

(SUSANNA WHITE *rushes in, left, breathlessly and without the formality of knocking.*)

SUSANNA: I have just heard the news about your leaving us. Oh, take me with you! My boys will grow up in ignorance here.

ELLEN: We are not going to England, Mistress White. And better times are coming.

SUSANNA (*hysterically*): But I want to go back while we still have the chance. What if no others ever come and we never have another chance to get away!

ELLEN: I thought you came that your children might be free to worship God as they thought best.

SUSANNA: I did.

ELLEN: If you go back now, Mistress White, Peregrine and Resolved will lose that for which their father gave his life.

SUSANNA: It is different with those who have their husbands and whose children have already gone to school in England or Holland.

ELLEN: There will be more people coming over here some day, and more children. Then we can have a school. I wouldn't be surprised if there were enough for three or four schools or even a college.

SUSANNA: Do you think so?

ELLEN: Yes, it looks to me as if this country is almost as big as England, and it will hold a heap of folks.

(*Enter* EDWARD WINSLOW *unnoticed.*)

SUSANNA: But the climate is too hard for the children. I must return to England where they will have more advantages. Oh, why do you oppose me when you yourself are returning to a comfortable life? (*She puts her head in her arms and sobs.*)

ELLEN: But didn't I tell you that I am not going back and neither are my boys? We have cast in our lot with the rest of the colonists, and here we are going to stay.

(JACK *looks up scowling as* EDWARD WINSLOW *speaks.*)

EDWARD: I have been thinking, Master Billington, that you may need another chest for your things. I'll be glad to let you take one of mine.

JACK (*sarcastically*): Thank you, Master Winslow. My boy Johnny is not too lazy to work. He is going to make me an extra one.

EDWARD: No need of that. If it would make you feel more comfortable, you might give me a table or bench in exchange.

(*Ever since* EDWARD *began to speak,* ELLEN *has been sending significant glances in her hus-*

band's direction and making signs that SUSANNA *and* EDWARD *be left alone.*)

ELLEN: This sassafras and julep tea is ready. I must take it to the governor. Jack, come to the storehouse and get some garden seed.

JACK: I don't need any seed, but I'll have to see Captain Standish about some corn for the trip.

(*Both go out, left, leaving* SUSANNA *and* EDWARD *alone together.* EDWARD *walks back and forth somewhat nervously, and finally stops beside the table near which* SUSANNA *is sitting. He coughs and then makes an effort at conversation.*)

EDWARD: The Captain is having a fine day to start his journey.

SUSANNA (*not looking up*): Yes.

EDWARD: It has been a good day for gardens, too. Is your plot in?

SUSANNA: No, the baby has taken a great deal of my time, and I really haven't been quite well myself. The garden has had to wait.

EDWARD: To be sure. You need a strong arm to lean upon. (*Sobs from* SUSANNA. EDWARD *begins pacing the floor again.*)

EDWARD: Your cabin has never been finished yet, has it?

SUSANNA: No. William was taken sick before he had the cracks between the logs plastered up. And the bedroom has not been partitioned off. I have been hoping some one would have time to finish it for me during the summer. (*She looks up hopefully.*)

EDWARD: I have put in a lot of time trying to make my place cozy and comfortable. And you know

Elizabeth and I brought over a great deal of our furniture from the Old Country.

SUSANNA: You are quite comfortably fixed, aren't you, Master Winslow?

EDWARD: Yes, in a way. But it seems so useless without some one with whom to share it.

(*No response from* SUSANNA.)

EDWARD: Those are fine boys you have, Mistress White.

SUSANNA: It is very kind of you to say so.

EDWARD: Resolved is such a lively little fellow that I sometimes wonder if you will not find it more difficult to handle him as he grows older. (*He runs his fingers through his hair.*)

SUSANNA: My brother is very kind about helping me, but the large amount of sickness in the colony has not left him free to do much for the children.

EDWARD: Elizabeth and I were never blessed with children. Resolved is just the kind of boy we should have liked.

SUSANNA: I surely appreciate your saying that, Master Winslow. A mother always likes to hear her children praised. Sometimes I have thought I ought to take the children and go back to our friends in England or Holland, so that my boys may have a better chance.

EDWARD: You must not do that. They'll only have to endure the same persecution from which we have fled. When we once get started here, life will be easier. Just now our need is for enough strong women to enable us to continue until more people arrive. (*He runs his fingers between his neck and collar to relieve the strain this speech has caused.*)

SUSANNA: Do you think our friends in Holland will be coming soon?

EDWARD: I wrote a long letter to Master Robinson, urging others to join us. I told them to bring enough provisions for a year. But the colony needs y-you just now, and I-I need you, too.

SUSANNA: What do you mean?

EDWARD: I am finding it very hard to manage alone since Elizabeth has gone. I have never learned to do the things about the house that we men always expect a w-woman to do for us.

SUSANNA: I thought Mistress Billington was looking after you.

EDWARD: She has been very kind, but I do not like to ask favors where I can make no return. Besides it is too lonely without someone to share my home with. Why should we not combine our fortunes, Mistress White - er - ah - Susanna? (*Runs his finger around his collar, as if to loosen it.*)

SUSANNA (*softly*): How so?

EDWARD: I could provide you with a comfortable home, be a f-father to your children, and do all the rougher work around the house. You could care for my clothes, prepare my meals and make my house a real home.

SUSANNA (*rising*): Edward, what would folks say?

EDWARD: What can they say? And why should it matter what they say? We must do what seems best for the good of the colony, the ch-children and ourselves.

SUSANNA (*sitting again*): True. (*Pause.*) You haven't any kitchen on your house, have you?

EDWARD: No, but I have two good cupboards for dishes and a clothespress. It is a cozy little house. (*He runs his finger between his neck and collar and otherwise appears nervous.*)

SUSANNA: There's nothing like a kitchen to make a woman's work easier.

EDWARD: Remember the house will go to the company at the end of seven years.

SUSANNA: But seven years is a long time to get along without a kitchen.

EDWARD: Then a kitchen you shall have. But I'll have to get more ground planted first.

SUSANNA: Yes, but I'll expect it this summer. Edward, don't muss your collar. Those starched things are hard to iron.

EDWARD (*standing awkwardly with his hands at his sides*): I'll get it done for you as soon as I can.

SUSANNA: And will you finish up the loft for a bedroom for the children?

EDWARD: But with the kitchen we'll have more room than any other f-family here. (*He takes his handkerchief from his pocket, rolls it into a ball, rubs his hands with it, etc.*)

SUSANNA: The boys are growing fast, and the extra room for them will be very convenient.

EDWARD: It will be a lot of extra work. Why can't they sleep in the kitchen? Where do all the other children of the colony sleep? Nobody else has a two-story house.

SUSANNA: Please put that handkerchief in your pocket. An upstairs will make the living room warmer in winter.

EDWARD (*hastily*): No: that is too much for any woman to expect. (*He takes his coat and prepares to leave the room, hesitates near the door, then changes his mind and comes back.* SUSANNA *sits,*

apparently indifferent to his decision.) Yes, Susanna, I'll finish up the loft, too. You shall have the house just as you want it.

SUSANNA: And may I send to England for a maid to help me with the work?

EDWARD: How can you be sure any one will want to come?

SUSANNA: I know where I can get some one. The Carvers have found their servants a great help.

EDWARD: I don't see how we can afford it.

SUSANNA (*rising and taking her cloak*): I must get back to the children.

EDWARD: If you know of anybody who will come, send for her, by all means.

(*Voices are heard off stage.*)

SUSANNA: Listen! Some one is coming. We are not ready to tell them yet. Let us get away, so that I can tell you what changes I want made in your cabin.

(*They go out, right. Voices are heard off stage.*) Stand up for your rights, Mistress Billington! (*Enter* ELLEN, *left, with* MISTRESS BREWSTER *and* MISTRESS HOPKINS.)

MRS. BREWSTER: My husband always speaks too hastily. He expects his three square meals a day with never a thought of how much time it takes to get them. I suppose it would make no difference to him if our number of able-bodied women were reduced to four.

MRS. HOPKINS: Four women to cook and wash and scrub for twenty-one men and twenty-four children! We must nurse the sick and make and mend the clothes, even when we have nothing to make them out of.

ELLEN: It is not quite that bad, Mistress Hopkins. Your Constantia is good help, and Priscilla Mullins will be a lady before we know it.

MRS. HOPKINS: If one of us should ask Captain Miles Standish or even one of the others to pick a wild duck or skin a rabbit, he would think he was abused.

ELLEN: It isn't that the men are unwilling to help us. They don't know how, that's all. They were brought up to be gentlemen, and this pioneer life is hard for them.

MRS. BREWSTER: And so were we brought up to be ladies!

ELLEN: It *is* hard on us, but our grandchildren will have an easier time.

MRS. BREWSTER: I hope they will appreciate the fact that their grandmothers had to endure everything their grandfathers did, and their grandfathers besides.

MRS. HOPKINS: The men will never appreciate us unless we teach them to do so. Don't you desert us, Mistress Billington.

ELLEN: Then stand by me.

MRS. HOPKINS: We will, wherever we can, but it is your problem.

(*Enter* JACK BILLINGTON, *left, carrying a bag of grain.*)

JACK: This is all the grain they'd give me, not much for four people. I just met one of Captain Jones' men. He came up to say they were starting in a half hour whether we were ready or not. Are the clothes and bedding packed yet?

ELLEN: I haven't packed anything yet and I do not intend to. Whatever you want to take you will

have to pack yourself. (*She rises.*) The boys and I are not going.

JACK: Ellen, you are wasting time. As my wife you have promised to honor and obey me. I demand that you get ready to return with the Mayflower.

ELLEN: Then I withdraw my promise.

MRS. BREWSTER: Don't take Mistress Billington away from us. There is no one in the colony as good as she at nursing the sick. We can't spare her while the Governor and Mistress Carver are so ill.

MRS. HOPKINS: We really can't spare her anyhow. There would be only four well women left to do the work if she went. And who would care for Master Cook's baby?

JACK: Let Master Winslow help you. He thinks everybody ought to work.

(MISTRESS BREWSTER *has signaled* MISTRESS HOPKINS *that it would be better to depart.*)

MRS. HOPKINS: Remember, we need you, Mistress Billington.

MRS. BREWSTER: Yes, stand by us.

(*She goes out, left, with* MISTRESS HOPKINS.)

JACK: You dare not desert me this way, Ellen.

ELLEN: You are the one who is deserting me. It was you who wanted to come to this country in the first place.

JACK: But I had no idea it would be like this. Go back with me, Ellen, I beg of you!

ELLEN: Not one step am I going.

JACK: I can't train the boys as I ought without your help.

ELLEN: You will have no need to train them. They will both be here with me.

JACK: I am still the head of this household. If I say they are going with me, that settles it.

ELLEN: The boys are mine. If you go, you go without them.

JACK: I say, the boys are mine. If you stay, you stay without them.

ELLEN (*rising*): I have suffered for the boys, Jack Billington, as you never have. I am the one who has always nursed them and cared for them. It is the mothers in this colony who have gone without food this winter that the children might be fed. That is why only four of us have been able to survive the strain. How many meals have you gone without for your children's sake?

JACK: Ellen, the laws of England give me authority over these children.

ELLEN: But who will enforce the laws of England here? Shall we let the colony decide it for us?

JACK: You know they would side with you against me.

ELLEN: Then shall we leave it to the boys? They are old enough now to have some voice in deciding where they shall spend their future.

JACK (*sitting*): Johnny is so eager to see his garden grow . . . bosh! . . . but he'd like to see his grandmother, too. Francis . . . I don't know how he feels about it.

ELLEN: Will you allow Francis to decide for himself?

JACK: I don't promise not to influence him if I can, but he may decide.

(*Enter* FRANCIS *and* JOHNNY BILLINGTON, *right.*)

FRANCIS: Are we going to leave, Mom? I don't want to go. Squanto is going to visit King Quadequina next week, and he says if you'll let me I may go along.

ELLEN (*putting her hand on Francis' shoulder*): You'll have to decide for yourself, Francis. Your father is planning to return to England. I am going to stay right here. You must choose for yourself whether you will go with your father or stay with me.

JACK: Francis, I'll get you anything you want if you will come with me.

FRANCIS: Would you get me a clasp knife?

JACK: Yes, you may pick it out yourself. And Johnny, wouldn't you like a fowling piece of your own? If you come with me, I'll take you hunting and fishing as much as you like.

JOHNNY: But there is better hunting and fishing here than in England.

FRANCIS: It is more fun to hunt with bows and arrows and traps the way the Indians do. Squanto is showing me how.

JACK: What *do* you want, Johnny?

JOHNNY: I want you and Mom and all of us to stay here together. Then I'd like to go over and explore that island I saw yesterday from the top of the hill.

JACK: Then you'll not come with me? Must Francis and I go alone?

JOHNNY: I'd rather stay here, Father, although it would be nice to see Granny again.

FRANCIS (*going over to his mother and putting his arms about her neck*): And I want to be where you are, Mom. I couldn't leave you.

JACK: But the knife, Francis?

FRANCIS: I'll get along without one a while longer. Squanto is going to show me how to make one out of flint.

(JACK'S *shoulders sag as he looks from one to*

the other and realizes his defeat. Then he straightens his shoulders, picks up a number of hastily assembled bundles and starts.)

JACK: Then I'll go alone! Good-bye. (*He walks to the door, left, hesitates, then turns back.*) Are there any messages you want to send to Granny or any of the friends?

ELLEN: No, we sent long letters by Captain Jones.

JACK: Then good-bye, Ellen. Good-bye, boys. (*He shakes hands with the boys who remain standing, one on either side of* ELLEN *as he goes out. As soon as he is outside the door, he turns back once more.*) I just want to say if you change your mind and want to join me in England, I'll be glad to see you any time.

(ELLEN *hides her face in her arms. In silence the boys watch him through the open door.* ELLEN *puts an arm around either boy and draws them closer to her. Enter* MISTRESS BREWSTER, *left, in haste.*)

MRS. BREWSTER: The doctor wants to know if you'll prepare some more of that sassafras. He says it's the best thing he knows to give the governor just now.

ELLEN: I am sorry. I used the last of the sassafras Jack gathered in the tea I took over a while ago.

MRS. BREWSTER: Can't he get some more? He didn't go, did he?

ELLEN: He is on the way to the boat now. Run, Francis, and stop him until Mistress Brewster can get there. (FRANCIS *hurries.*) I hope you can persuade him to come back, Mistress Brewster.

(MISTRESS BREWSTER *goes out, left.* ELLEN *sits at the table, her head buried in her arms,*

while JOHNNY *watches the scene from the open door.*)

JOHNNY: The people are down on the shore. They are all kneeling and Elder Brewster is praying.

ELLEN: Can you see your father?

JOHNNY: Yes, he is walking. Francis is running. He has caught up with him . . . he has stopped . . . they are talking. (ELLEN *listens eagerly.*) He has turned toward the boat . . . he is going on . . . (ELLEN *buries her face again.*) Mistress Brewster is running . . . (ELLEN *listens again.*) She is calling to him . . . he has stopped again . . . they are talking . . .

ELLEN: Is he coming? Is he coming back?

(*A bell rings in the distance.*)

JOHNNY: What's that?

ELLEN: It's the boat signaling for him to hurry. What is he doing?

JOHNNY: Francis is taking his bundles.

ELLEN: Will Francis go with him? Oh, why did I send him?

JOHNNY: No, they are all coming this way. Mom, he's coming back!

ELLEN: Thank God?

(CURTAIN)

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